Refining Speaking and Listening Skills Using Podcasts

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Abstract

This paper presents, the process followed in a case study research carried out at a private school in Tunja, with the tenth grade students. Podcasts were used as a tool to refine the listening and speaking skills, where the students evidenced some difficulties at the time of understanding speeches and conversations in class, and trying to talk about different themes. This research was based on some surveys and interviews to get the students' responses that showed that despite of attending to a private institution where its core subject was English, they did not feel confident and expressed the lack of tools to develop these skills. Through the podcasts, learners approached to the development of these skills, because of the likingthey had for

Resumen

Este documento presenta un estudio de caso llevado a cabo en el Colegio Andino de Tunja, con los estudiantes de décimo grado. Los Podcasts fueron la herramienta para refinar las habilidades de escucha y habla, en donde los estudiantes evidenciaron tener algunas dificultades, a la hora de tratar de entender conversaciones y de hablar acerca de diferentes temas. Esta investigación se basó en algunas encuestas y entrevistas hechas a los estudiantes, las cuales mostraron que a pesar de que los estudiantes pertenecían a una institución privada en donde el énfasis de educación era el inglés, ellos no se sentían seguros y para poder desarrollar estas habilidades. A través de los podcasts, los estudiantes se acercaron al desarrollo de estas habilidades, debido al gusto que tienen

technology, and also because the activities, exercises, workshops and even tests were designed and adapted bearing in mind their likes, interests and needs.

Key words: Podcasts, listening, Speaking, Responses.

por la tecnología y porque las actividades, ejercicios talleres e inclusive los exámenes fueron diseñados y adaptados pensando en sus gustos intereses y necesidades.

Palabras clave: podcasts, escucha, habla, respuestas.

Introduction

For a long time, the content displayed in the English textbooks has been the basis of English classes in schools. Mostly textbooks are focused on grammar and the use of structures is far from what English is in real situations.

On the other hand, daily development and advance of technology is almost never involved in the classes, teachers are afraid of combining new strategies to teach and practice the language, bringing and including technology in the planning and designing of lessons.In addition, involving the use of phones, tablets, smart phones and different electronic devices for practicing the language can include new strategies and new methodologies, which result in teachers and students having multiple experiences with the language.From these tools Podcasting, from the new web 2.0, it was an interesting and innovative tool that helped to engage students in the practice of their listening and speaking skills inside and outside the classroom during the development of the study. Therefore, some activities were planned and adapted from some of the most important English courses and web pages, to be interactive and to be done anywhere and everywhere using any topic of interest.

In relation to this assumption, there were some important theoretical constructs that supported and helped to correctly build the project and in accordance to the students' likes and interests.

Literature Review

New Technological Tools for Learning

One moving aspect of the web 2.0 tools is that they are free programs that could replace the traditional application sites for which schools must usually pay. Some perform the familiar functions, such as word processors, spreadsheets, and presentation tools.Solomon & Schrum (2007) stated that, we used to talk about reading, writing, and arithmetic as the essential skills for literacy. To be literate today involves acquiring new skills, including those of technology, understanding science, having global awareness, and most importantly, having the ability to keep learning, which involves gathering, processing, analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting information as well as communicating and collaborating. Therefore, as the podcast was the selected tool to let the students build their listening and speaking skills, it was relevant to talk about its benefits for students and teachers in the classroom.

Podcasting in the Classroom

"Podcasting is an automated technology that allows listeners to subscribe and listen to digitally recorded audio shows" Flanagan and Calandra (2005). Listeners can either listen to podcasts from their computers or set their media player to automatically download them to an MP3 player. Therefore, Podcast as the technological tool to use throughout the project according to the difficulties in speaking and listening that the selected students had; that is to say, that Podcast allowed to select alternative audio-visual material to encourage them to practice these skills and then, produced recorded reports and finally important responses and experiences based on what they heard.

Podcasting Benefits

"Podcasting provides increased flexibility and portability and allows for time-shifting and multitasking" (Thorne & Payne, 2005) Cited by Abdous, Camarena& Facer (2009). Podcast provided the students at Andino School Tunja the opportunity to have an alternative way of learning and practicing their speaking and listening skills with something that gottheir attention due to their marked desire for technology and worked on autonomous learning, where they had to create their own podcasts putting into practice the strategies learned in class, as it was said by (Lee & Chan, 2007) cited by Abdous, Camarena & Facer "The academic use of podcasting allows for constant accessibility to the teaching and learning experience, while enabling then-demand learner to control and personalize the learning process."About the skills that students most feel afraid of in class, listening and speaking, when they do not feel confident or do not feel motivated to practice them different from the traditional way, textbooks and CDs in the classrooms; therefore, listening was the first skill to talk about and how it could be taught through the use of podcast.

Teaching Listening

This is probably the most important and most demanding skill when someone is interested in learning a language, because acquiring the skill to understand native speakers' speech in different contexts and about different topics, is a demanding work that takes time and a lot of practice; the speed, accent and pronunciation of native speakers sometimes become difficult to understand as well. But no doubt, this is the most important skill, because it provides the chance of getting new vocabulary, improving pronunciation, learning new expressions, and learning new topics that help to interact with people without feeling frustration.

Accordingly, listening provides the necessity to understand what is transmitted to achieve a logical interaction in English, or even in the language the person wants to learn; for example, Krashen (1985) cited by (Brown, p. 300) argued that, "borrowing insights from first language acquisition, stressed the significance of comprehensible input, or the aural reception of language that is a little beyond the learner's present ability". That is, students are mostly exposed to information or input in classes, but, unfortunately, when there is not a good level of English among students or it has not been worked a lot, it is really difficult for them to understand most of the words and utterances expressed in them.

According to Brown (2007) there are some practical principles for designing listening comprehension and they were the basis to create techniques and activities. These principles are as follows and were developed with the students in this way:

1. Include a focus on listening in an integrated-skill course. Through the use of podcasts, students were involved in different activities that led them become familiar and gradually improve their ability to understand a speech in the foreign language. Because of the students' level and age, the material selected for developing these activities was designed based on challengeable contents that allowed students to get a better ability in listening.

2. Use techniques that are intrinsically motivating. In this research the techniques used toapproach students to a listening skill were workshops where they had to work on vocabulary, downloading of tracks, providing their opinions in relation to a specific topic, and finally the creation of a podcast.

3. Utilize authentic language and contexts. The use of podcasts in English classes allowed students to interact with the use of authentic language in real contexts, showing them the availability of topics, expressions, vocabulary and accents.

4. Carefully consider the form of listeners' responses. During the development of this research, students showed enthusiasm and motivation towards the practice of listening through podcast, because the podcasts used were selected according to their likes, interests and age.

5. Encourage the development of listening strategies. Students learnt a new way of listening to English with something that can be portable and useful, based on the activities developed in the class.

6. Include both bottom up and top down listening techniques. Students were asked to repeat the podcast as many times as they could to familiarize with the speech in such way that they started listening podcast with familiar words and vocabulary, and at the end they were able to act the content out using what wasnecessary to create their own podcasts.

On the other hand, and not less important was speaking skill, which let humans communicate and express ideas, feelings, likes and, etc. so, speaking is probably the second most important skill when someone wants to learn English, because it implies real communication and that is what people want to achieve when learning.

Teaching Speaking

Brown (2007) argued that: "the interaction between these two modes of performance applies especially strongly to conversation, the most popular discourse in the profession. And in the classroom, even relatively unidirectional types of spoken language input (speeches, lectures, etc.) are often followed or preceded by various forms of oral production on the part of students." That is to say that, listening and speaking skills are also important when English is taught as a foreign language, because these skills are interlinked and can be understood as input and output of information in the learning process. Furthermore, speaking is

what students and people who learn English are more interested in refining, because it allows them to communicate and interact with native speakers in different forms such as direct conversations, lectures, etc.But when this skill is not worked out in class, it is extremely frustrating for students at the moment they want to express ideas and vocabulary and fluency to not be able to fulfill the purpose. So, speaking can be practiced in different ways and with different strategies to let the students do it well any time they want to, and why not, do it with real English, with real topics that gettheir attention.

Principles for Teaching Speaking

Brown (2007) cited some principles like in the listening part treated above, in which there are some for teaching speaking and how they helped to create techniques and activities. These principles are as follows and were focused on the study in the following way:

1. Focus on both fluency and accuracy, depending on your objective. With the use of podcasts, students centered their attention on the activities planned and tried to do them better each time because of the chance of re-recording and improving their mistakes in the language.

2. Provide intrinsically motivating techniques. The most motivating part of the project was to find out that most of the students enjoyed learning English because they wished to travel or live abroad. Moreover, some of them have relatives living in different countries and it was a strong reason for improving their English level. Another reason was theirprofessional

desires, some of them had well decided the careers they were going to study and the importance of managinga good English level. .

3. Encourage the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts. Students were encouraged to practice authentic language with the activities, because podcasts allowed them to listen to people talking about familiar topics and then create their own without hesitating in the use of the language.

4. Provide appropriate feedback and correction. All the podcasts submitted by the students allowedindividualizing their work to later be checked

5. Capitalize on the natural link between speaking and listening. The two skills were always interlinked with the activities and the use of podcasts, because students must have practiced listening through the recordings downloaded from PodOmatic web page and then, construct their speech with meaningful vocabulary and topics of their interest.

6. Give students opportunities to initiate oral communication. Podcasts made the students start a speaking process, in which they realized about the importance of this skill to communicate, beginning with basic vocabulary and gradually became more fluent and understood on their speeches.

7. Encourage the development of speaking strategies. In this process, podcast was the powerful strategy to encourage the students to practice their speaking skill through technology, and then,

show their performance with act it outs, role-plays, videos and recordings (podcasts) with interesting results.

With these principles, speaking activities hadgenuine purposes for students, because they tried to speak, without feeling stressed about what classmates said and classroom pressure, or what topic they had to talk about. Consequently, Podcasting contributed to letting students speak about any topic and the ease to make records anytime and everywhere, learning new vocabulary and expressions in any handheld device.

Instructional Methodology: This project implied a constructivist methodology, because students were able to practice their skills using Podcasting, doing some adapted activities that let them build their own knowledge and reinforce their skills, building their vocabulary, pronunciation and knowledge ofthe language. Clarkson & Brook (n.d.) cited in Giesen. (n,d), Pondered that, "students' learning styles focus on knowledge construction, not reproduction Uses authentic tasks to engage learners."

Christie (2005) cited in Giesen (n,d) stated that, (a) "Learning is an active process." (b) "Knowledge is constructed from (and shaped by) experience." (c) "Learning is a personal interpretation of the world." (d) "Emphasizes problem solving and understanding." (e) "Uses authentic tasks, experiences, settings, assessments." (f) "Content presented holistically–not in separate smaller parts." Takingthis into account, with process of podcasts, the students were able to create their own knowledge through the listening and

speaking activities, some of them contained vocabulary activities, because most of them used authentic language tasks that encouraged them to improve their skills, vocabulary and also to feel motivated to practice their English all the time, using their cell phones, computers and portable devices.

At the same time, the students were interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the project, because it was important to get the students' responses about their experience on their listening and speaking skills. Therefore, to contribute to the research process, it was necessary to make transcriptsof the interviews to then dothe analysis of data.

Coming up next, I stated the activities planned to develop with the students during the exercise of podcasting. It was divided into five items related to the activities, the suggested level in which the students moved through the research if it was an individual or group work, and finally, the activities at random or continuity activities.

First activity (Halloween): On the First Activity "Halloween", taken from the British Council Web Page, they seemedmore comfortable and confident talking about something they knew well, because it was close to being celebrated. Atthe beginning, they had to develop a reading activity to get specific vocabulary and answer the questions enclosed in it; after that, when they were really involved in the topic, they had to speak and make a record about this special festival.I felt really amazed when I got their report and I realized they did an amazing job, of course with a lot of mistakes, but with

a lot of creativity, instead of their mistakes in pronunciation and accuracy in the language.

Second activity (Urban Tribes): About the Second Activity (Urban Tribes), this one was a workshop based on a set of adapted activities, to let the students differentiate these groups and their characteristics in clothing, behavior, thoughts, music, etc. At the beginning, they were introduced by a game called "Guess Who", where the students sat each other back, in order to feel comfortable with getting new vocabulary about physical appearance and clothes, as an introduction to each Urban Tribe characteristics. After this, they completed some vocabulary activities based on the previous one, later, they saw a video clip of a song called "skater boy" performed by Avril Lavigne, something that really called their attention; at the end of the video they had to answer some questions about it and that was the second speaking part of the activity.

Third Activity (Likes and dislikes Rock and Roll): This time, the students were contextualized in their music preferences such as Bachata, Vallenato, Rock, Reggaeton, etc. For this reason, a discussion was established to determine which genre was the most voted and they selected to talk about Rock and Roll. Therefore, I let the students go to web pages such as PodOmatic and Absolutely Intercultural, in order for them to listen to some programs and podcasts about Rock and Roll history and radio interviews. The idea was that they get informed about this topic and thus, they could express their point of view and likes in a podcast created by

them. The result was interesting because some of them made videos and interesting podcasts about Rock and Roll history.

Fourth Activity (Personal Information): In this activity, the students were provided with a short interview questions sheet made by the teacher, in order to be able to speak about themselves; then, one by one answered the questions in a personal interview, in class. After that, they had to write a short text in which they included all the information in it and based on this speech, taking into account they had to express their personal information with likes, dislikes and personal description in a 5 minutes podcasts and then shared with their classmates in order to be published on the PodOmatic web page.

The students were working on the PodOmatic web page, in order to create their accounts and thus, selecting topics from it and later being able to download and upload podcasts as free will.

Fifth activity (episode 11) taken from: elementary podcast British council: Episode 11 is one of a series of podcast created by The British Council in which students could practice different skills such as reading, listening, writing and of course, speaking. Also vocabulary is immersed in the activity. The students felt more comfortable with these activities lately; because they could read what they were listening and so they said they understood the content of the podcast better.

Sixth activity (episode 12) taken from: elementary podcast British council: Episode 12 is one of a series of podcast created for The British Council in which students could

practice different skills such as reading, listening, writing and of course at the end speaking, also vocabulary is immersed in the activity. The students felt more comfortable with these activities lately because they could read what they were listening and understood the content of the podcast better.

Methodological Framework

This study was carried out under the qualitative paradigm, following the case study research, because it led identify the way to get information and thus understand what and how to do for collecting data, that later would be analyzed and would produce the results to contribute with a study that may help students with different forms of practicing English and reinforce two important skills such as listening and speaking.

The case study relied on any of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian's repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing (Yin 2002, p. 8). The setting was the Andino School founded in 1986, the group of students was made of 29 students among 15 to 17 year olds, (20 women and 19 men) mostly from Tunja city.Their level of proficiency and accuracy in English was pre intermediate to intermediate.

The whole group was involved in the application and development of the activities with podcasts; however, to analyze the data as bestas possible seven, of them were selected randomly. According to Camacho de Baez (2003, p. 90), with this method, researchers can analyze and examine deeply to interpret the changes that can be produced in a person, in a group, or in a situation; it can be in his/her behavior or his/her feelings, way of thinking and interaction.

Data Analysis

Looking at what students' responses were after working with podcasts and thus, tried to establish some categories based on their answers to find a solution to my research questions; then, organizing the information. First, analyzed the interview applied. Transcribed and codified it sequentially.Finally, in order to validate my findings I used triangulation, because I decided to use several techniques to collect information to understand the students' responses on using podcasting, as a way to practice listening and speaking skills. (Merriam, 1988)

After doing their podcast about different topics and activities set for them, the analysis was based on the In Vivo Code process, because with it I established and organized the students' responses about the topics that supported the research, about this Saldaña (2008) explained that, "The codes are based on what outcomes the student receives from his mentor. Note that one of the codes is taken directly from what the participant himself said and is placed in quotation marks – this is called an InVivo Code", they argued about some trouble they had when recording themselves, for the reason that, they said that they felt a little shame trying to speak in English, because they had not heardtheir voices in English through their portable devices or computers before; some of them expressed the

necessity of doing the activity more than once and laughed a lot because of the times they had to repeat it.

As an example: About this the Student D said: "I liked working with podcast and help us improve speech and learn new vocabulary to be managed our way of expression in the English language. Is the first time that this type of activity management in subject of English and it seemed very interesting to continue to improve our language and that gives us the time to talk to a person in front." Subsequently, this response shows the student understanding of podcast used to practice his/her listening and speaking skills and acquire new vocabulary every time they do one. As a result, with the use of podcasting students and teachers understand that they are audio files done by any person around the world and that they can share experience and different topics as they like without any pressure.

On the other hand, these categories seemed to correspond to the specific question and sub-questions stated to carry out this project. The titles of particular colors related to queries were set in the following way: red, for the first sub-question related to the aspects of students' use of podcasts to work on their listening and speaking skills; green for the second sub-question that corresponds to the students' responses in bringing possibilities to listen and talk and finally, blue, for the last sub-question about the students' enrichment abilities through technology. Analyzing the students' responses as possible replies to the questions followed this process.

Of course, they made mistakes in accuracy and fluency, but podcasting made them to be informed about another way of practicing the language, as one of the students expressed on the first interview: The student Z: "In front to the experience of the podcast, I think it was good because I could experience another way to learn English and to me how much of my mistakes. I actually practice had nothing negative at all times since this exercise was to teach us, for the sake of ourselves"

To sum up, two subcategories emerged and to join these subcategories around the term Response, to find out how a group of students from tenth grade at Andino School reinforce their listening and speaking skills when they were engaged in the use of podcasts. Finally, the criterion that was used was Purposeful Sampling. Finally, in order to validate the findings, triangulation was used, because to use several techniques to collect information to understand the students' responses on using podcasting as a way to practice listening and speaking skills (Merriam, 1988).

Becoming Aware of Podcasting as a Tool for Practicing Listening and Speaking Skills. This category intended to identify the students' knowledge about technology and their interest in practicing different things using a computer, not only for passing the time playing games, chatting or downloading videos for leisure, but also using it for learning new things like practicing their English skills.For example, listening and speaking by using podcasts and their experience with them before the study.For this reason, the first question was about this:

Did you have any knowledge about podcasting in your previous classes? (Have you ever done a podcast?) This could be noticed when they at line 10 said: C: "Si lo había escuchado, pero nunca lo había hecho".The student Z said "no nunca había tenido conocimiento, no, dentro de las cases nunca hacíamos esto, siempre eran talleres en cuaderno" and the student MP: "no, pero me parece muy bueno porque uno aprende más practicando y hablando o escuchando más el idioma"

This category is supported by a sub-category which enriches the information and responses of the students about the use of podcasting and its implication on their listening and speaking skills; this sub-category is: enjoying podcasting for improving listening and speaking.

Enjoying podcasts to improve listening and speaking skills. This sub-category talked about the students' perceptions and feelings after using podcasts for improving students' listening and speaking skills. Based on the activities I planned for the students in order to enroll them in the world of podcasts for the first time, students answered how they felt with this tool in their English learning process. The question: How did you feel working with podcasts? The students C: in his interview affirmed that "kind of, because my voice is more slow and I want my voice will be more fast, I know vocabulary and I listen to my own voice if it is good or bad" and another student Z said: "I felt very comfortable working with our podcast since increase English skills. Is good because it helps to improve listening skills"

Approaching Students to Use Technology for Acquiring and PracticingNew Vocabulary to Listen and Talk. The second category referred to the importance of using technology such as computers, portable devices,iPods or other electronic devices to practice the language and acquire vocabulary to improve their listening and speaking skills.In this category, I tried to center the students' attention on the awareness of using technology to practice their English. Did you use the computer and your internet access for practicing English? About this aspect C said: "si, pues practico algunas veces porque tengo un curso de inglés" and Zaida said: "nunca lo había hecho… nunca" and the student MP said: "el uso son para las canciones, pero me gustaría saber la manera de entrar a páginas para practicar el idioma, pues no lo uso para practicar el inglés, pero tengo unas páginas"

Technology as Motivator for Enriching Listening and Speaking Skillsinthe Language.This category referred to the possibilities that technology provides to improve skills and the students' awareness of this. What skills are easier to practice within the computer having Access to internet? At line 50 C said: "a mi me gusta escribir" and Zaida said: "vocabulario leer ya que puedo aprender vocabulario y también el listening porque puedo aprender la pronunciación de las palabras" and the student MP said: "ehhh, la escucha ehhh yyy el habla. Escuchar se me facilita más para el vocabulario". Consequently, podcast were interesting tools to motivate students to learn and practice English or any other language because through it they could look for new expressions and vocabulary from

real people all over the world and share recordings about topics of their interest.

Finding difficulties using podcasts. In this sub-category student talked about the difficulties when they face to podcasts and technology for the first time to practice the language. The question: what trouble did you find when you worked with a podcast?At line 85 C said: "el vocabulario que fue lo más difícil de los Podcast, creo que me fue muy bien porque, porque uno se suelta más al hablar en inglés si se tiene de que y uno tiene la oportunidad de parar porque y volver a grabar" and Z said: "no, fue fácil, la pronunciación, ehh el tiempo, ehh la redacción también porque el hablar no se oye como se escribe, bueno es una experiencia rara porque oírte hablando es algo que no comúnmente se hace" and the student MP said:"bueno pues al principio empezamos a hablar, y empezamos a decir hi… y nos reíamos. Jejeje, ehhh fue muy chistoso porque fue la primera vez que lo hago, ehhh casi no puedo grabar"

These categories and subcategories that appeared at the end of the analysis of the research, enabled to find the conclusions of my experience as a researcher and to determine if Podcasting was a good strategy to involve the students in the world of English, showing them that listening and speaking skills can be practiced with technology.

Conclusions

In order to conduct this study, I posed a research question which let me go through the path of the study to find the responses of tenth graders when they practiced their

listening and speaking skills through the use of Podcasts. These questions involved the following issues: Podcasts and listening and speaking skills. How do students build listening and speaking skills through the use of Podcasts?

Throughout the study, I realized that English is a language that allows teachers and students to take different paths to learn and practice it, because thinking about the four skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading and writing, they can be practiced in class altogether or if teachers prefer, they can also be practiced one by one; bringing a variety of alternatives to interact with our students and why not, to encourage them to look for strategies that make that learning English be an exciting and useful experience every day.

The use of Podcasts as a new strategy to teach English and practice Listening and speaking skills, helped the students to build pronunciation, vocabulary and accuracy, each time they participated with the activities planned to carry out this research, because listening and speaking were practiced by the students in a different and fascinating way, using their portable device, downloading material about different topics, learning new expressions and improving vocabulary and pronunciation.

Anytime they had to create a new podcast, they had the opportunity to listen to authentic English material, and in the end, they produced significant Podcasts for the class, where they showed that they could also speak about different topics, instead of the making mistakes or errors.

Podcasts allowed determining the students' responses after having practicing with both skills listening and speaking, involving students in the use of authentic English situations. Podcasts were an excellent tool to use in class for the variety and availability of contents to listen and download them into a portable device at any time. Therefore, students realized that practicing listening and speaking could be updated to the current world. Besides, Podcast allowed me to find alternative audio-visual material to encourage students to practice these skills and then, produce important responses and experiences based on what they listened to and created in the end.

To conclude, integrating technology into the classes was a very powerful tool, because it introduces the latest methodologies for teaching and learning the language, because of its applications and strategies with it; therefore, it was important to encourage my students to learn and practice English without feeling under pressure and thus, attract their attention every day and everywhere.

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